

NOT APPEARED  
ON PAGE A1.

WASHINGTON POST  
11 April 1987

## Reagan Says Outlook Brighter for Accord

J By David Hoffman  
Washington Post Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES, April 10—President Reagan today welcomed Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's suggestion to accelerate talks to limit the number of short-range nuclear missiles in Europe.

Reagan also said a "breakthrough" on related negotiations to limit intermediate-range missiles "is now a distinct possibility."

The president delivered an upbeat assessment of the prospects for an accord on the intermediate-range missiles on the eve of Secretary of State George P. Shultz's trip to Moscow. Reagan also said "the welcome mat is still out" for a Gorbachev visit to the United States.

But Reagan again denounced the Soviet Union for espionage directed at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and suggested, indirectly, that Soviet sabotage had not been ruled out in recent American space disasters.

In response to a question about whether there was Soviet sabotage in recent U.S. space disasters, he said, "Let me just say, we aren't ignoring anything in our investigation of the space problem and we are determined to go ahead with it and continue with our program in the next decade or two of having a space station out there because of the great good that can come from it."

However, a senior White House official said later that while such investigations are routinely made, there is no evidence to support a claim of sabotage.

Reagan said the first item on his agenda for U.S.-Soviet relations is a Soviet pullout from Afghanistan. "The bleeding wound of Afghanistan must be healed," he said.

In a speech followed by a question-and-answer session at the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, Reagan expressed puzzlement at what he called the "outright selling . . . out of our country" by Marine guards at the Moscow embassy. The guards have been charged with espionage in a sex-for-secrets scheme involving Soviet women.

"It's hard to explain," he said of the espionage affair. But he then blamed "value-free education" in American schools, saying that the nation has stopped "teaching on the basis of moral principles of what is right or what is wrong." He told an anecdote about a school counselor who he said was unwilling to instruct students that it would be wrong not to return a billfold with an address in it and \$1,000.

Reagan expressed doubt that such espionage is "widespread" and said the disclosures have been "a severe blow to many of us."

In an address in Prague earlier today, Gorbachev said that the Kremlin is ready to discuss reducing short-range nuclear weapons in Europe as a means of speeding agreement on eliminating intermediate-range missiles. Gorbachev suggested that talks on the short-range missiles run concurrently with the intermediate-range negotiations.

The short-range issue is considered the main obstacle to an Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement. The West, with NATO European partners in the lead, has insisted that the removal of intermediate-range systems—missiles with a range of 600 to 3,000 miles—would leave a 9-to-1 Soviet superiority in missiles with a range of less than 600 miles. Any INF agreement, the West has maintained, should include provisions allowing for the United States to increase its short-range systems to match the Soviet level in Europe.

White House officials said they read Gorbachev's suggestion in Prague as a gesture to accelerate the talks and Reagan quickly responded positively. "I'm pleased to hear him [Gorbachev] say it," he said in response to a question.

In his speech, Reagan said the Soviets had shown "new seriousness" on arms control in recent weeks. "A breakthrough in the talks on intermediate-range missiles is now a distinct possibility," he said.

"I challenge the Soviets to join us in moving ahead on an agreement on intermediate-range nuclear missiles that enhances overall security and military stability," he said.

Reagan has often made similarly optimistic statements on arms control but has not achieved a single major agreement with the Soviets during more than six years in office.

The president said the allies' concerns about short-range missiles "are central. We cannot permit the benefit of the reduction in longer-range INF missiles, for example, to be undermined or circumvented by a continuing imbalance in shorter-range INF missiles, in which the Soviets have a huge advantage."

Reagan again made a general defense of his planned Strategic Defense Initiative missile defense system, but steered away from discussing specifics of instructions he gave Shultz for his meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. Reagan also said that he would share the system "with anyone" to protect against a madman launching a nuclear missile.

The president also reiterated his proposal to cut strategic nuclear forces by 50 percent, but refrained from discussing any time frame. The time frame has been the subject of internal administration disputes recently.

"If I had to characterize U.S.-Soviet relations in one word it would be this: proceeding," Reagan said. "No great cause for excitement, no great cause for alarm."

Reagan also said the United States welcomes release of prominent Soviet dissidents but is looking for evidence that broader changes will be made. He also repeated his criticism of Soviet expansionism in Central America and vowed the United States would continue to aid the Afghan resistance.

On the espionage charges, Reagan said he could not respond to Soviet claims that the United States had carried out spying against the Soviet embassy in Washington. He said U.S. intelligence is subject to "rigorous oversight" and congressional scrutiny, but he did not elaborate.

Reagan also said the United States would not agree to an international conference on the Middle East involving the Soviets and the Palestine Liberation Organization until they recognize Israel's right to exist. In an apparent inadvertence, he referred to the PLO as a nation.